TheVillage

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Issue #235 June 2023

NEWS & FEATURES from Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Blackwell, Burcot Beoley, Cofton Hackett, Finstall, Hopwood, Bordesley, Rowney Green, Lickey, Lickey End, Marlbrook, The Oakalls & everywhere in between!

TheVillage Issue 235 June 2023

inside

Bringing you village life for almost 25 years

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THE WINDS OF CHANGE

AS THE DUST settled from the local election results, a new-look district council to make "better" big local decisions that affect us all was taking shape.

After almost a quarter of a century, the Tory grip over Bromsgrove District Council was prised from the levers of power and, with no party close to a majority, councillors from across the spectrum had to find a way forward.

It seems almost certain that at the first full meeting of the council on May 24, a Labour motion to return to a committee-based system would be agreed as the best way to share power across council decision-making.

The current "cabinet" system, would be unworkable without one party in overall control – but it will need to continue while agreement is sought to bring about the change and during the transitional period, which could take up to a year.

One likelihood is that Conservative and independent councillors will share the six cabinet posts until the changes come in.

As the Conservatives won the most seats on the council, the current council leader, Karen May, is likely to continue in the role, with the possibility that former Alvechurch Parish Councillor Sue Baxter, who was elected as an independent to the district council in Drakes Cross ward, will be deputy leader.

VILLAGE AREA WINNERS

Alvechurch South: Alan Bailes (ind)
Alvechurch Village: Rachael Bailes (ind)
Aston Fields: Jane Elledge (Lab)
Barnt Green & Hopwood: Charlie Hotham (ind)
Cofton: Anita Dale (Con)
Lickey Hills: Bakul Kumar (Con)
Marlbrook: Helen Jones (Con)
Norton (& Lickey End): Robert Hunter (Lib Dem)
Rubery South: Esther Gray (Lab)
Slideslow: Sam Evans (Lib Dem)
Tardebigge: Peter Whittaker (Con)

PARTY TOTALS

Conservative,11; Labour, 8; Independents, 7; Lib Dem, 5.

The alternate prospect of a coalition between the independent, Labour and Lib Dem councillors was seen as creating too much instability.

It is also thought that as the Conservatives garnered more than 38 per cent of the total votes in the election, with Labour's 21 per cent the next highest total, it would not be representing the wishes of the electorate.

These percentages should, however, be seen in the light of the Conservatives fielding candidates in all 31 wards, while Labour only had candidates in 21. The independents won more than 17 per cent of the total vote, despite having candidates in only 11 wards.

Independent councillor Charlie Hotham, who was re-elected in Barnt Green & Hopwood ward, told *The Village*: "As a result of the election it gives the opportunity to the independents to have far more influence over the way the council is going to be run, both during the transition period and once we have entered the committee system."

Coun Hotham outlined the likely timetable to Barnt Green Parish Council's May meeting, explaining: "There have been intense discussions and it appears the way out of the hung council impasse is to have a committee-based system.

"At the moment, it is six people in the cabinet making decisions unilaterally."

Coun Hotham said he had spoken to Worcester City councillors, where a committee system operates, and they said it was working very well: "People are working together better across party lines and they said the decisions being made were better."

To establish that system would take 12 months because it would be implemented at the annual meeting of the council in 2024.

"It will still have to be a cabinet-based system for the first five or six months. I would hope there would then be a transition to a hybrid system until May 2024," Coun Hotham added.

AFTER St Laurence bell ringers, Alvechurch, lost a couple of members of the team, they had only seven people for eight bells.

A campaign in February brought in new recruits and even though training takes several months, two could join in for the King's Coronation to get all eight bells ringing.

Then six experienced ringers "fired" the bells as a celebration, ringing all the bells simultaneously rather than in sequence for an unusual sound that's only heard on special occasions.

‘Stop the Blot’ is back over new hotel plan

VILLAGERS have relaunched their “Stop the Blot” campaign after plans to turn a social club into a multi-room hotel were resubmitted.

The application for a 28-bedroom hotel on the site of Alvechurch Sports & Social Club, currently called the Alvechurch Inn, was submitted during Bromsgrove District Council’s local election hiatus.

The new independent councillor for Alvechurch South, Alan Bailes, has requested that it be “called in” to be decided by planning committee councillors and not just by council officers.

The previous application for a 30-room scheme met stiff opposition from villagers, with 74 objections lodged against the plan and only one submission in support.

The Stop the Blot campaign is urging all those who objected to resubmit their complaints, although time is short and they need to be made online at the Bromsgrove planning portal by Sunday May 28.

One of the main concerns is the loss of up to 50 public parking spaces in the village centre under a long-standing arrangement which the application says will not be renewed.

This would affect village centre businesses, shops and cafes, and in particular create difficulties for patients visiting Alvechurch GP surgery, which is a few yards from the car park.

The application is due to be discussed at Alvechurch Parish Council’s planning committee on June 5. There is a Bromsgrove planning committee on the same evening, but that is likely to be too soon for this application to be considered.

MEMBERS OF Alvechurch Dramatic Society celebrate success at the National Operatic and Dramatic Association West Midlands Annual Awards ceremony. Both of the society’s 2022 productions, *Love Bites* and *Rip van Winkle and the Sleeping Beauty*, were nominated for awards, in the Best Drama and Best Pantomime categories respectively, with *Love Bites* winning the award for Best Drama in Worcestershire and Avon.

Battle of the planters and Santas

THE UNDECLARED competition between two parishes was stepped up on two fronts as Barnt Green decided their floral street planters needed a fresh approach.

Parish councillors there are also starting the Christmas competition with neighbouring Alvechurch early, with an approach to an actor in possession of a “professional” santa costume.

The May meeting of Barnt Green Parish Council heard that village florists Oasis had been approached to plant and tend the planters on the pavements of the village centre.

Chairman Roberty Cholmondeley said: “Oasis say they will do the planters for £100 cheaper than we have been paying – and they want to make them look better than those in Alvechurch. I think Oasis have got the right spirit!”

As the council agreed to ask Oasis to take on the planters, Coun Charlie Hotham said he hoped they would see a “fountain of colour” this year.

The councillors then heard from Coun James Baldwin, who said: “I have tracked down a fellow thespian who tells me he has a professional Santa outfit. He may be happy to do it for us. He’s got a good stage presence so could be good.”

The council agreed Coun Baldwin should follow this up.

Village festival’s traditional theme

BLACKWELL Village Festival will have a traditional village fayre theme following a survey of residents.

The event, at the school field between 1pm and 6pm on Saturday June 10, will feature a host of activities for all the family with many time-honoured events and competitions.

One of the festival planners said villagers had spoken, and the organisers had listened. “We held a survey earlier in the year and people said they wanted a more old-style traditional feel with lots of activities for people of all ages,” he said.

“With all the fairground games and races, families should have bags to do – and all of it for free. And there are lots of other things to appeal to those who used to be young, like tea and cakes, beer and a live band.”

More information from Bob Jefford 07786 246108 bobjefford@gmail.com

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Words & pictures by Keith Woolford

Woodland bells on show

PARK Rangers at the Lickey Hills Country Park provided visitors with the opportunity to enjoy some beautiful bluebells, with guided walks through the park in May.

Ranger Penny Marriott led one group through the woods to the sound of birdsong to view the bluebells, one of the most popular and beautiful sights in spring.

Along the way, Penny pointed out other features and "was an encyclopaedia on legs", one of the group commented.

As they walked, she touched on the ongoing but necessary felling of trees throughout the park, the planting of thousands of saplings to balance the books, the resurgence of depleted heathland, the wildflowers starting to peek out and demonstrated the tasty wood sorrel.

As promised, Penny led the group to clusters of bluebells scattered throughout the woodland. All of the bluebells the group saw in the park were native, however, there are also Spanish interlopers elsewhere in the park.

Returning from the leisurely two-hour ramble, Penny then showed the group bees pretending to be wasps and all sorts of tricks they play from their small sandy-soil burrows on the bank just below the Visitor Centre patio.

Ranger Penny: Gives a nature show-and-tell.

Success: The group discovered fields of bluebells.

With a forest resident: The group gather for a picture.

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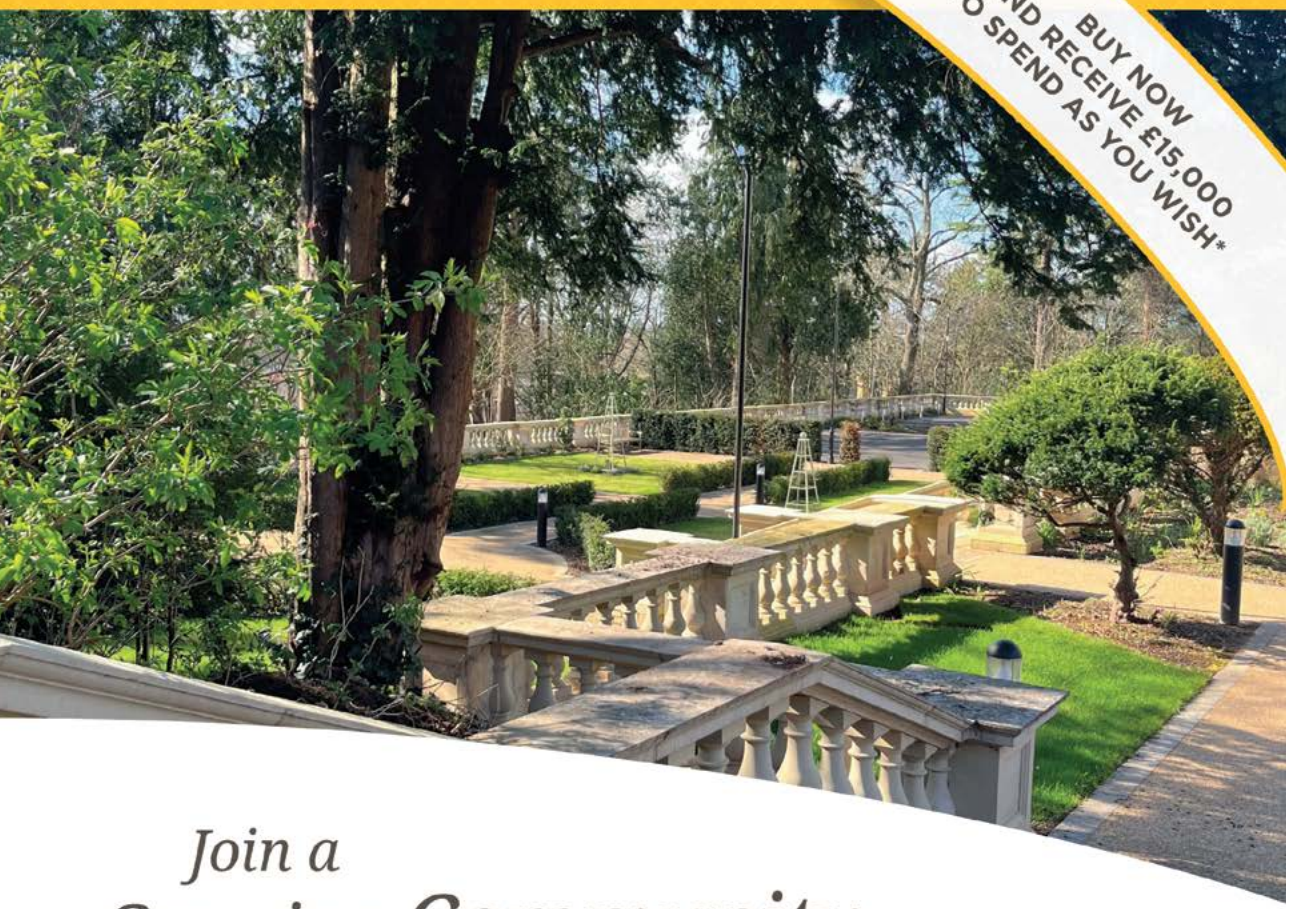

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Words & pictures by Keith Woolford

Helping out on the hills

LICKEY Hills Country Park rangers arranged another session collecting debris discarded by visitors on Rednal Hill. This particular session was organised as part of a national event, "The Big Help Out".

Ranger Penny Marriott welcomed the more than 30 volunteers who had braved the wet and dreary weather to join the party on the hill.

The Village readers may remember last summer, a wildfire raged through the park, destroying several acres before being brought under control.

Penny remarked that "despite the horrendous damage shown on national news, we are still seeing a number of fires and BBQ's being lit regardless of our signs. We have collected an impressive amount of broken glass this morning – a great job as one small piece could ignite another fire. We are very grateful to all those that responded to our request for help today".

The weather greatly improved once the volunteers got to work, with views seen across the golf course below to the hill opposite, although slightly muted by cloud cover.

Much ground was cleared, and a few small finds were picked up during the session, including a small metal spoon. A 1937 two-and-sixpence coin was picked up by The Lickey Hills Society member Baden Carlson. Baden has donated his find to the Visitor Centre display cabinets.

The next debris collecting session is to be held 10.30am Saturday 27 May from the Visitor Centre in Warren Lane.

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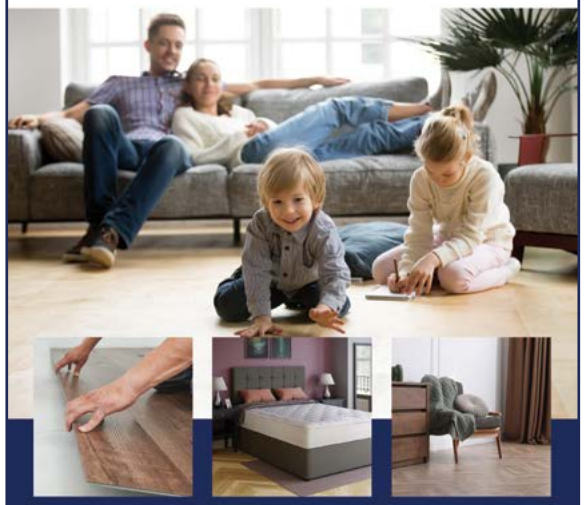

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An independent thanks

Dear Editor – Please could we express our thanks to all those who voted for us at the recent Bromsgrove District Council elections.

We will do our very best to represent all residents and do everything we can to look after the interests of our wards and wider district of Bromsgrove.

As always if you have any local concerns please don't hesitate to contact your Independent councillor.

Rachael Bailes,
Councillor for Alvechurch Village.
Alan Bailes,
Councillor for Alvechurch south.
Charlie Hotham,
Councillor for Barnt Green and Hopwood.

Rugby night lights

Dear Editor – Kings Norton Rugby Club on Ash Lane in Hopwood are a community club with over 200 junior and adult players from age five upwards.

We also host American football, Rugby League and Ultimate Frisbee teams at our ground.

We are currently running a crowdfunder (www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/low-energy-floodlighting-kings-norton-rugby-club) to support the replacement of the main floodlights at the club with low energy LED lighting.

Like many sporting organisations we are struggling with high energy costs and have had to review our training session times with the current lighting. The new lighting would use over 75% less energy making it a long-term affordable solution for the club and offer a more sustainable solution.

Simon Thompson
Club Treasurer,
Kings Norton Rugby Club

Stumped no longer

Dear Editor – In response to Terry Louch's letter which featured in last month's issue of *The Village*:

Thank you, Terry, for your pictures and query.

In the 'before' picture you can see big black fungi on the stump – they are the type of fungi called Polypores or bracket fungi.

The second picture (right) shows how they have eaten away at the dead wood, part of the natural cycle of decay. Lots of other little creatures might be eating away at it too once the process has started.

Mary Green

Have your say . . . about anything!

email: editor@villageonline.co.uk
or write to: Letters, The Village,
The Limes, Swan Street, Alvechurch B48 7RR

Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.
The deadline for the next issue is June 10th 2023.

WHERE'S VINNY?

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD, Amaya Patel, from Barnt Green, and a pupil at Bromsgrove School, shows off the Mini Vinny she won for finding the little creature in May's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village*.

If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).

Tell us where he's hiding via email or post – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.

The closing date is midnight on June 6 2023. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!

A celebration of Housman's work

Dear Editor – I wanted to let your readers know about a celebration event which has been arranged for Monday 10th July.

Through a collaboration of Bromsgrove's leading arts organisations and institutions, an evening event to celebrate the works of the town's renowned poet, A.E.Housman will mark the Housman Society's 50th Anniversary. The celebration evening will include the magnificent musical settings of Housman's works to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Ian Venables, complimented with poetry recitals.

Above: The Dante Quartet.

Musical accompaniments will be given by some of the UK's foremost classical artists. The Dante Quartet, pianist Benjamin Frith and former BBC New Generation Artist, tenor Alessandro Fisher, who will each perform additional pieces within the programme.

A selection of poems will be recited by the BBC Midlands Today Presenter, Nick Owen, a long-time Housman enthusiast.

The evening will take place in Routh Concert Hall, Bromsgrove School in front of an audience, and will be live streamed. The concert will be preceded by a welcome drinks reception at 6.30pm with the concert starting at 7pm.

Tickets for this prestigious event are £25 to include the drinks reception. Students of all ages are invited free of charge. Those who are unable to attend in person can buy the streaming link for £12.

Concert tickets and the live stream link are available from **www.bromsgrove-school.co.uk/boxoffice** or tickets can be purchased from Decanter Spirit on Bromsgrove High Street (cash only please).

Renowned poet: AE Housman.

I write to you on behalf of the collaborating team from the Bromsgrove Society, the Housman Society, Bromsgrove WORDS, Bromsgrove Concerts, Bromsgrove District Council, Bromsgrove Arts Alive, Friends of St John's, Bromsgrove Festival and Bromsgrove School itself.

We do hope your readers will join us for what is promised to be a wonderful celebratory evening.

Jo Slade
Bromsgrove Society Chair

Back in the charity saddle

LAST year, more than 50 people took part in a village charity bike ride, starting and finishing in Barn Green, to raise money for Birmingham Children's Hospital.

Neil and Fiona Edwards, who organised the event, said: "It was a great success and we wish to thank all who took part, volunteered or donated."

Fiona and Neil also held a stall at Alvechurch Picnic in the Park – and from the two events raised £5,313.

Fiona told *The Village* about their goal for 2023: "This year as a family we are aiming to raise £13,000 to buy two heated cots for the neonatal unit.

"So far we have raised £4,530 from Fee's Tree Christmas Tree Recycling and £3,355 from our son, Ewan, running the London Marathon.

"Please come and visit us at Picnic in the Park this year and sign up for the bike ride and help support Birmingham Children's Hospital."

This year's bike ride will take place on **Sunday 2 July**. It is open to all ages and abilities. There are three route options: 12 miles, 27 miles and 50 miles, taking in some of the beautiful Warwickshire and Worcestershire countryside.

There is a £20 registration fee, with under-16s free. The registration fee and all further sponsorship will go directly to Birmingham Children's Hospital.

All riders will receive a medal on completion of the route and there will be a complimentary BBQ and drink to celebrate everyone's achievements.

A registration pack can be obtained by emailing barntgreenbikeride@btinternet.com and keep up to date on Facebook Barnt Green Bike Ride BCH.

Donations to support Birmingham Children's Hospital can be made at: www.justgiving.com/fundraising/bchbikeridebarntgreen.

Huge achievement: The Edwards family have raised thousands for BCH.

Cyclists ready: Register to join this year's charity bike ride.

20 From The Village archive Years Ago

HERE'S THE COVER of the July/August 2003 issue of *The Village*, featuring "Backlit Poppy" by Simon Harris, of Barnt Green. Backlit pictures must have been popular around that time because the previous issue, May, had featured backlit beech leaves. If anyone is wondering what happened to the June 2003 issue, well . . . so are we!

COURTING CONTROVERSY

THIS ISSUE reported the deliberations and decisions of the consistory court hearing into plans for £1 million church hall at St Laurence, Alvechurch – the building known now as The Ark.

This was highly contentious 20 years ago because it involved selling to property developers a piece of adjoining land known as the Black Paddock.

The consistory court was held inside St Laurence and presided over by Charles Mynors, the Worcestershire diocesan chancellor. In his judgment, Mr Mynors approved the plan to build The Ark, but urged a "spirit of unity" after the discord the plans had caused.

He said: "It is extremely unfortunate that there appears to have arisen a widespread and strongly held feeling that the church, and in particularly the Rector, has failed properly to consult the whole of the congregation and, more especially, those in the village outside the community of regular worshippers."

Mr Mynors noted that one witness for the church "was obviously dismissive of the value of consulting the wider community; as he put it, 'had we approached every Tom, Dick and Harry in the village . . .'

"That sort of attitude is totally inappropriate," he added.

Before the bulldozers: The entrance to the Black Paddock from School Lane, Alvechurch.

10 From The Village archive Years Ago

IN ONE OF OUR most bonkers covers, the organisers of a pantomime horse race at Alvechurch Picnic in the Park donned horses (and camel!) heads to promote the event. Sponsored by local businesses, it was a fantastic spectacle, but led to a number of collisions and injuries and has – so far – never been repeated.

SPEED LIMIT GLITCH

THE PERENNIAL problem of vehicles speeding through our villages dominated the news pages of the June 2013 issue, with one village discovering its speed limits were unenforceable. A special meeting at Finstall Village Hall heard from parish chairman John Prescott: Any of you can get caught speeding and you will not get done."

The anomaly on the Alcester Road had come to light when the Safer Roads Partnership were asked to carry out speed monitoring.

IN ROWNEY Green schoolboy Callum Savage, aged nine, won £25 from Rowney Green Association for his anti-speeding slogan, which was then turned into wheelie bin stickers (right) by Bromsgrove District Council.

TOUGH TIMES

The June 2013 issue carried another instalment in the life of Norah May, taken from her memoirs – this time recounting her life in poverty as a six-year-old, moving from Punches Castle to Bug Row on Swan Street, Alvechurch, in 1912 and then the forced move with her mother out of the village. Norah continued to attend school in Alvechurch, walking long miles every day in her clogs, and told how she would be late in winter because the snow would build up under the soles, making walking very difficult.

From Wonderland to the land of Oz

ALVECHURCH Middle School pupil Lottie Carney (right), aged 12, will take to the stage this summer in the starring role of Dorothy in the Palace Theatre's show *The Wizard of Oz*.

Lottie, has previously performed in productions including *Alice in Wonderland*, *Little Mermaid* and *Fame* at the Redditch-based theatre. She told *The Village* that she is very excited to have been cast in the role of Dorothy, especially as she loves performing and acting and singing in different roles, however it is just as important to her to do something she loves with both her school and theatre friends.

Devoting much of her time to performing arts, Lottie is a keen and active member of the school's music and drama department, has recently enjoyed taking part in a 48-hour production of musicals organised by her music teacher, and is a member of a Year 8 girl band, in which she plays the guitar.

Find out more about *The Wizard of Oz*, which will be running from 13-15 July at: www.redditchpalace

theatre.co.uk/whats-on/all-shows/the-wizard-of-oz

Or, if you would like to make a group booking with your school or organisation please contact: Benjamin.adams@rubiconleisure.co.uk

Reaching for the stars

ASTON Fields-based gymnastics club Starbound Gymnastics Academy took part in the Solihull and Birmingham invitational team and individual floor and vault championships.

Gymnasts from the club competed in a number of categories. Gemma Buchanan and Marie Carrigan, the club's head coaches said "We are extremely proud of the gymnasts. The children work so hard and it's lovely to see that it's paying off."

The club has grown in popularity in recent years, following the success of British gymnasts at the World, European and Commonwealth championships, and gymnastics is more popular than ever.

Gymnasts with Starbound currently train at Basepoint Business centre in Bromsgrove, however the head coaches are stepping up their search for a larger, permanent facility where their gymnasts can train on full sized equipment. They hope that if they are able to find a larger facility, they will be able to offer more children the chance to try gymnastics, as their waiting list is currently closed.

Starbound gymnasts: Hoping to find a new place to practice.

Gemma said: "It's a lovely problem to have, but also very frustrating. Due to the small size of our facility, we limit our classes to 10 gymnasts.

"In a larger space we could have many more children in a class and clear the waiting list easily.

"We want to be able to give more children the opportunity to take part in gymnastics. We really want a space we can call our own."

Starbound academy are now looking for an industrial unit, or similar with a minimum of five metre eaves, available on weekdays and on Saturdays.

Gemma and Marie have asked *The Village* readers, if anyone has such a unit available, please get in touch with them via email **starboundgymnasticsacademy@outlook.com**

CHOOSE THE LIFE YOU WANT

Live-in Care: Living the Way I Want

In England and Wales, over 10 million people live with a disability (*source: office of national statistics*). While many live fully independently, others may require additional support.

The right kind of care and support is imperative to maintaining a good quality of life. Help from family and short visits from domiciliary care agencies may not meet people's needs, leading to feelings of helplessness and dependency. In such cases, a more flexible approach to support can be life-changing.

What is Live-In Care?

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Why choose live-in care?

With live-in care, individuals can enjoy the benefits of person-centred care while continuing to live independently. For some, this means staying close to their community and familiar surroundings, for others, pursuing education or career opportunities.

Enabling Independence

Tom, a 29-year-old with cerebral palsy, previously lived with his parents, with two daily visits from a domiciliary care agency. While this provided some level of support, it limited his independence and could not meet all his needs. Tom worried about his future once his parents would no longer be able to care for him.

After researching alternative options, he contacted a local consultant from live-in care provider Promedica24.

International Company, Local Presence:

Promedica24 is Europe's largest live-in care provider, covering over 130 locations across the UK and Europe and continuing to grow their workforce despite the struggles faced by the wider sector. Their service has achieved a 9.9 rating on Homecare.co.uk and is rated 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission. The company has also been shortlisted for three Home Care Awards 2023.

Promedica24's Person Centred Solution:

Since starting his care package, Tom has moved into his own flat.

He lives independently and has a full-time job in the IT industry. His carer supports him with daily tasks, and they enjoy travelling and exploring new places together. Tom's life has transformed. He no longer worries about the future, and has the freedom to live life on his own terms.

Ready to take the next step?

If you're exploring care options, consider reaching out to your local Promedica24 Care Consultant Cathy:

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Words & pictures by Keith Woolford

Village People

SMOOTH SAILING AT MAY OPEN DAY

A beautiful day for a sail: Anila and Kaitlyn, both aged 14, take to the water.

ON the day of Barnt Green Sailing Club's Open Day, the weather proved bright and sunny, a very welcome change to the mixed weather in early May.

The club, which is now more than 100 years old, welcomed visitors with the calming sound of lapping waters, gentle breeze and an escape from the busy hustle and bustle of life.

In the peaceful oasis nestled away from the sound of cars, and traffic, visitors enjoyed a day of learning and finding out more about the club.

Members of the Fishing Club, which is also on site, spoke to visitors about memberships and fishing skills.

Youngster Frankie Leach brought along his grandad Gary as they were both considering joining the fishing group. Another Gary, the Fisheries Officer, showed them one of the rods used on the water.

There was plenty to learn as visitors were able to take trips out on the reservoir, and there was plenty to see for keen bird watchers.

Two young members of the club gave an impromptu demonstration with great enthusiasm of how to right a sailing boat, which had capsized. With a snug-fitting life-jacket, there were opportunities to take to the water and sail around the reservoir with an experienced club member.

A friendly, welcoming family-feel ensures all ages are catered for at the Sailing Club, as those who attended the open day remarked.

Families of all ages demonstrated their skills on the water, with groups (such as the one on our front cover), sailing around the water with ease under the warm, blue sky.

Eight-year-old Martha Dyer demonstrated her confidence in the water, paddling solo across the reservoir.

Not only is the Sailing Club for water sports, relaxing and bird-watching, but the clubhouse also holds its own in-house events and is also available for weddings. For larger gatherings, a marquee can be erected.

If you're interested in learning more about Barnt Green Sailing Club, you can find further information at: www.sailingbarntgreen.com

Left: Martha Dyer kayaks across the water with ease.
Above: White sails shine brightly against blue skies.

Clockwise from left: Frankie Leach is shown the rods, two young visitors enjoy the sunshine on the banks, smiling faces enjoying the open day, fixing the boat that had 'fallen over' . . . the technical term used by onlookers on land!

FOCUSING ON EYE HEALTH

The arrival of the summer months tends to have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing, but it's important to consider our eye health too. The team at **Specsavers** in Redditch Sainsbury's are here to help, providing professional and affordable eye care.

START THE SUMMER RIGHT

The beginning of the summer can offer the perfect opportunity to take stock after winter indulgences and focus on your health.

Unless your vision has changed, you might not give your eyes much thought when it comes to health. But your eyes do have the potential to reveal a lot about your general health, even if they don't feel any different.

That's why Specsavers at Redditch Sainsbury's, on the Alvechurch Highway, is keen to highlight the importance of having your eyes tested regularly.

"Often, the kinds of conditions we pick up have very few or no symptoms at all in the early stages," explains Gurdeep Bansal, store director. "With regular eye tests, we can monitor eye health, using the latest technology to identify early signs of issues including macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma, diabetes, and even brain tumours."

EYE TESTS EXPLAINED

Every eye test at Specsavers Redditch Sainsbury's is performed to a high standard. During your eye test, an experienced and highly-trained optometrist will not only check your prescription and level of vision, but also examine the areas around the eyes to look for signs of abnormality, injury or disease.

Team training and experience is complemented with the use of advanced optical technology, including retinal imaging with Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) scanning and digital photography to provide a detailed picture of the central and peripheral retina, optic disc and macula. This allows the optician to build up a picture of how your eyes are changing over time.

Expert care: Specsavers eye tests are carreid out by highly trained staff with state-of-the-art equipment.

The OCT machine, which is usually found in hospital eye departments, produces a structural scan of the eye, including parts that wouldn't normally be visible with traditional eye testing techniques. It means the expert team can pick up any problems very early on.

Specsavers recommends that you have an eye test every two years. However, in some circumstances, your optician might suggest you have an eye test more frequently if you:

- have diabetes
- are aged 40 or over and have a family history of glaucoma
- are aged 70 or over

FRAMES YOU LOVE FOR LESS

At this time, many people are cutting back on spending, which can be a challenge when also focusing on your health. The team at Specsavers Redditch Sainsbury's understands this and offers a huge range of specs that won't break the bank.

Specsavers stock a wide variety of glasses priced from just £15, to designer styles from £99. With frames from the likes of Tommy Hilfiger, Karen Millen and Marc Jacobs, there's sure to be something that matches your style and individuality perfectly.

Specsavers Redditch Sainsbury's team members are highly trained in fitting and styling, using Digital Precision Eyecare.

The software captures a range of essential dispensing measurements that are used to make the chosen frames the perfect fit for everyone.

The store is open seven days a week;
9am-6pm Monday to Saturday
10am-4pm Sunday

Visit:
www.specsavers.co.uk
to find out more.

GET SUMMER-READY TODAY

SUMMER is almost here (despite some of the weather lately), and ***Lunatips Nails and Beauty***, located in Cofton Hackett have got everything you need to get ready for your holidays, whether you're heading somewhere hot or staying in the UK.

If you're looking forward to the sun, but sigh at the thought of shaving again, Lunatips are now offering courses of Skinbase IPL hair reduction. IPL stands for Intense Pulsed Light, which targets hair at the follicle, stopping the hair from growing and providing a permanent solution to hair removal . . . no more waxing or shaving!

In order to achieve permanent hair reduction, it is recommended to have a course of six to 10 IPL treatments (however for facial hair they may recommend a longer course of treatments). This will target hair at all stages and prevent regrowth.

Helen Jenkinson, salon owner and experienced beauty therapist said "We're really excited to be able to offer IPL to our clients. At Lunatips we're always looking to offer a range of the best treatments available and IPL is a great permanent solution to hair loss for those who want it, whether it's because summer's coming, or because they've always wanted a particular section of hair removed."

If you're interested in IPL, Helen encourages readers to get in touch to arrange a consultation, where you will have the opportunity to ask any questions you might have. Helen said: "The most common question we'll probably be asked is 'does it hurt?' We think it hurts less than waxing, and a special cooling device is used before the treatment which helps. Skinbase suggest it feels a bit like an elastic band being flicked on your skin - not as bad as waxing anyway!"

For more information about IPL and other beauty treatments including gel nails, massages and waxing, contact Lunatips today:
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Clinical Director, Karun Dewan
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Specialist in Endodontics, Prosthodontics & Periodontics
Dental Implantologist
Karun is a highly skilled and qualified consultant, whose dedication and focus on patient care is evident throughout the practice.

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*Documentation relating to our Privacy Notice and the Worldwide Dental Emergency Assistance Scheme, including assistance levels, limiations and exclusions is available to view online at https://scheme.wideas.co.uk/patients
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NOT YOUR AVERAGE DENTIST

RESTORE dental practice, based in the centre of Barnt Green tell *The Village* more about the high quality range of dental services they offer, and how their team of highly qualified, consultants, specialists and general dentists are dedicated to putting their patients at the heart of their care.

A TRIP to the dentist isn't often at the top of the list when you think of relaxation. However, the sleek and modern clinic, set up by Clinical Director Karun Dewan tells a different story. With a relaxing, comfortable atmosphere, **RESTORE Dental Specialists** offers treatments of exceptional quality, using state-of-the-art technology.

Established during the pandemic in 2020, the idea for a specialist referral practice had always been a dream of Karun's, and despite the setbacks that the pandemic presented, he persevered to open RESTORE.

Karun, an award-winning specialist dentist, aspires to improve confidence and aesthetics for all the patients who are treated at RESTORE. He holds the strong belief that every patient should be able to make an informed decision about their treatment. Which is why at RESTORE you will find choice at the heart of patient care.

RESTORE is a dental referral centre where many patients are sent when their own dentists do not have the equipment or expertise to treat them. With over 150 clinics referring patients to them, RESTORE have established themselves at the top of the game for dentistry in the West Midlands.

They are proud to be the only practice in the West Midlands with six consultants and specialists, supported by a skilled team of dental nurses and administrative staff, offering expert knowledge and treatment in:

- Paediatric dentistry
- Oral surgery
- Orthodontics
- Endodontics
- Prosthodontics
- Periodontics

Meet the team, from left: Amanda (Nurse), Abs (Paediatric Consultant), Karun (Clinical Director), Sunny (Orthodontist Consultant), Fay (Nurse).

Their skill, professionalism and the quality of their work, is evident by their excellent reviews and five star rating on Google.

Now, RESTORE are opening their doors to more patients, offering general dentistry appointments.

Dr Emily Cairns is a general dentist and dental sedationist who has a special interest in restorative dentistry and has recently joined the team at RESTORE. Karun said "We are so pleased to welcome Emily to the team, she has excellent experience and her calm nature will benefit patients when they see her. Some people can be anxious about seeing a dentist, and Emily has a very reassuring manner."

Patients of RESTORE, are meticulously looked after and their care is put above all else. "We encourage patients to see their general dentist regularly, so we can spot problems before they arise to help them maintain healthy teeth and gums, this also prevents extensive restorative treatment in future," Karun explained.

RESTORE's Membership Plan entitles patients to two dental health examinations annually, and two hygiene appointments plus X-rays. Children under three also benefit from free check-ups subject to one parent being on the plan. Enhanced memberships are also available and offer further benefits in the package.

Joining the team: Dr Emily Cairns will be taking on patients.

For outstanding care during your regular check-ups, in a friendly, relaxing environment, contact RESTORE and speak to a member of the team.
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Time for a sex-life MOT?

Dr Penny Goold explains why some women may experience a lack of interest in sex at some point. She explains how Bromsgrove clinic **Your Sexual Wellbeing** can help if you want to make a change, with a qualified medical and psychological approach to improving your sexual wellbeing.

JUST over half of women in the UK have experienced sexual difficulties with approximately 1 in 10 reporting significant distress because of it. Lack of interest in sex is the commonest complaint.

So why does it happen? It is not abnormal to lose interest in sex because sex is more complicated than you might think.

Desire, for most women, is not always spontaneous and occurs in response to external prompts that trigger arousal and/or desire. The brain must be open to receiving the stimuli and be able to respond. What could possibly go wrong?

To create desire, certain conditions need to be in place. It can be likened to the brakes and accelerator of a car. The accelerator being the things that might increase arousal and desire, such as intimacy and foreplay, positive feelings towards partner, previous positive experiences.

The brakes include things like, concerns about body image, worries about children, relationships or work, lack of time and energy, lack of privacy, grief, past trauma, physical or mental health issues, menopausal symptoms and fear of pain or discomfort.

Unfortunately, the brakes list can be much longer and seems to have a much more influential role in our ability to enjoy or be open to sexual intimacy.

This can lead to excuses and avoidance. When this happens, sex falls to the bottom of a long list of priorities and the longer it stays there, the harder it becomes to create space for it.

In addition to the important positive benefits for relationships there are positive health and psychological benefits associated with regular sexual activity.

Only 20% of women with sexual difficulties seek help. So why do we put more emphasis on everything else and why does sex fall to the bottom of the list?

If you want help to rediscover your desire and understand your brakes and accelerators (and where sex is on your priority list) please book an appointment: www.yoursexualwellbeing.com

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UNDERSTAND YOUR BODY

Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs, from **VHK Women's Health Clinic** explain how hormones influence various symptoms in perimenopause including mood fluctuations and low mood.

THERE is a commonly held belief that women only really start to experience symptoms of menopause in their 50s after their periods have ended.

However, most women will start to experience multiple and varied symptoms long before their final period, often from the early to mid-40s.

This hormonal phase of a woman's life is called the perimenopause and equates to the time when the menstrual cycle may start to change. Bleeding patterns can become more erratic, last longer and become heavier.

Hormone levels of oestrogen and progestogen start to fluctuate before their natural decline. These changing blood levels lead to the changes in the monthly cycle, but as oestrogen has a role throughout the female body, a multitude of other physical and psychological symptoms can occur.

Live your life to the fullest: Keep track of your symptoms to better understand your body. *Image: Shutterstock*

At VHK Women's Health Clinic we often hear from women about the impact of mood changes which significantly affects mental wellbeing both at home and in the workplace.

Symptoms such as anxiety and panic attacks can trigger palpitations, sleep disturbance and a loss of confidence.

Mood fluctuations are often described as worsening pre-menstrual syndrome, coupled with low energy and headaches.

Joint aches and exhaustion often result in women believing they have other significant health issues such as rheumatoid arthritis or an underactive thyroid.

We would recommend keeping a diary of symptoms to determine if there is any pattern to your monthly cycle and symptoms.

For help and advice in managing your symptoms of perimenopause and other health concerns, book your appointment with VHK Women's Health Clinic: www.vhkwomenshealth.com

PERIMENOPAUSE, HRT & DESIRE

VHK Women's Health Clinic invite you to a relaxed evening to talk about the hormonal impact of perimenopause on your health and wellbeing.

Tuesday 27th June | 7.30pm | The Garrity, Barnt Green

We will be joined by Dr Penny Goold of Your Sexual Wellbeing, and Leila Holmes from PhysioAdvantage. We will cover what the perimenopause is, the symptoms you might notice and how it might impact on your body, mind, and relationships. We will share tips on how you can adapt your lifestyle to support self-management along with discussing the significant impact of the menopause on sex and desire and how it can be improved by good self-care and hormonal treatments.

Tickets are £10, which includes a drink on arrival and all proceeds will go to the UK's Gynaecological Cancer Research Charity, The Eve Appeal.

For further information and ticket sales, please email: vhkwomenshealthclinic@gmail.com

COMMUNITY CORONATION CELEBRATIONS

Over the May bank holiday, villagers came together to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III with street parties and community events.

Members of a Lickey Residents Association put on a fabulous street party to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III, the day after the events at Westminster Abbey.

Sandwiched between two days of awful weather, the villagers enjoyed a "high tea" in the sunshine, amongst friends.

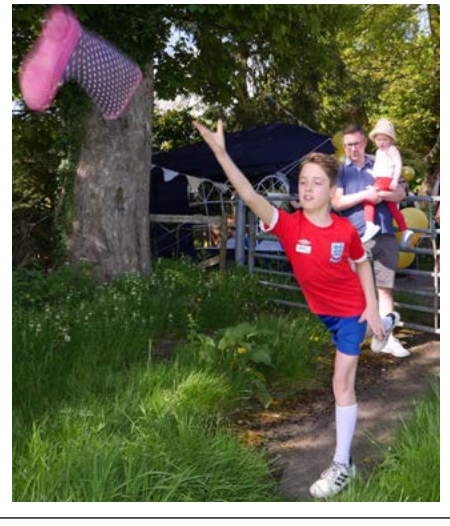
The festivities included competitions, including "Best Cake" which was held under colourful bunting, flags and balloons. The best newspaper crown was quickly followed by Welly Wanging, which proved very popular – if a real challenge for some. One enthusiastic competitor lost the unsuspecting wellington boot in a nearby tree.

Villagers took part in several egg and spoon races, cheese rolling and karaoke.

As the sun set, a beacon was lit and the new, updated national anthem rang out across the party.

Chair Chris Jenkins said "It was a lovely change from the usual BBQ's and it turned out to be one of the most successful events we have held over the years and would take some beating.

"Everyone had got together for this special occasion for a really jolly time. It was a wonderful afternoon and a real privilege seeing friends and neighbours celebrate this historic event together. All the children received a commemorative coin depicting the new King".



Clockwise from top right: Best cakes are tested; Egg and spoon contestants get ready; Welly wanging in full swing; the beacon is lit in celebration; Children's paper hat winners; the street party gathers together to cheer for the camera.

Pictures & words: Keith Woolford

Not your classic garden game: Cheese rolling.

Testing: Chris with cake judges Sandy and Jane.

LICKEY & Blackwell Parish Council and St Catherine's church arranged a joint "Coronation Street Tea Party", at The Wheel, Blackwell. An apple tree was planted (above) to commemorate the coronation, and an incredible amount of baking had taken place so visitors enjoyed plenty of tasty cakes.

The event was officiated by the Rev Sheri Gidney and all visitors thoroughly enjoyed the successful event. Of the money raised from the party, £200 was donated to the Kemp Hospice.

Young party goers: The children of the street party gather together.

Coming together: Residents of Sandhills Lane enjoying the sunshine together over the coronation bank holiday weekend

Drone picture/Toby Hunt

VILLAGERS in Sandhills Lane, Barnt Green, celebrated the Coronation of King Charles III with a street party. "It was a roaring success" said one party-goer.

The party was organised by Alex Burgess, Roz Miller Nikki Potter and Nicola Denning, who also organised the Jubilee party last year. Sandhills Lane Road was closed from 12pm till 5pm allowing residents to enjoy the party safely.

Residents brought food to share at the party and much merriment was had by all. They spent the afternoon enjoying community spirit in the sunshine with plenty of food and drinks while celebrating the new monarch.

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Village Finance

Planning your future

This month, **Martin Pryor** discusses the importance of planning for the future you want, how to ask the right questions, and how a financial planner aims to help you to prepare for and achieve your lifelong goals.

WHERE do I start? At the beginning, said Pooh! Well, I don't know if Pooh really did say that, but the great Steven Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, said, "Start with the end in mind," and I know that's true.

When you start any meaningful project, it makes sense to consider what it will look like when it's finished.

Walt Disney knew this well. Walt died in 1966, several years before Disney World opened in 1971, and at the park's opening a reporter allegedly said to his brother Roy that it was a shame Walt couldn't see the opening. Roy replied: "Walt saw it, and that's why you're seeing it."

The effect of thinking about and visualising our intentions is more powerful than we give credit. Taking time to actually think – not remember or daydream, but think – about how you want to live the rest of your life is seldom used.

We have a limited amount of precious time on this planet, but many of us go about our days living in a trance as if life is a continuum.

A good financial planner can potentially help you design your life, so that you live your life intentionally or on purpose. You can do this by yourself, or with your spouse/significant other, but often using the skills of an experienced and qualified financial planner will aim to help you get out of your head and make meaningful progress much faster.

When I first meet a new client, they often have a task or action they'd like to accomplish. It may be to review a pension, ask a tax question or prepare for a life event such as a birth, wedding or death.

These events are stepping stones in our journey of life; what's more important is life itself, to find your bigger picture.

I start by asking my clients a series of questions, not about their income, expenses or pensions (although these details are obtained), but deeper, more probing questions to help them get outside of themselves so they live their life by design and not by default.

To establish any relationship, you need to know about the other person, and how better to get to know someone than to ask great questions and then listen.

If I asked you "How do you want to live the rest of your life?" What would you say?

It's a great question for you to consider the things in life that are important to you, over the course of time. You might forget about your limiting beliefs for a moment and show me the real you.

It's questions like this that help you design your future roadmap, because when you are consciously aware of the actions you need to take, you're more likely to be open to the opportunities and suggestions when they appear.

For some this may necessitate a career change to allow more time, or money to achieve outcomes. For others it may be a physical move to fulfil a desire to be nearer an area or family member.

"How do you want to live the rest of your life?" is a great global big-picture question that directs the conversation.

What are your values?

I then want to know your values around money. What's important about it to you?

I don't want to assume that what's important to me will be important to you.

We grow up with many different influences on us, which shape us into who become as adults and form our foundations as our core values.

For example, if your family struggled financially when you were as a child and you saw your friends having money and the things you want, it may make you want to achieve more, grow your wealth and be "successful!"

Perhaps a parent was made bankrupt or defrauded, which could make you more cautious and not want to take on too much risk and repeat their experience.

This knowledge is essential in helping your planner develop your financial roadmap.

Understanding what's important to you in your relationship with your financial planner is also vital. I need to know what your expectations are and whether I feel they are reasonable enough for me to meet them.

I'd much rather know this now than be disappointed down the road when your expectations are not met.

And, as a relationship is a two-way thing, so we planners have expectations of our clients too, and it's important these are shared so that we start off on the right foot.

What are your short-term goals?

Learning what's important to you is a vital first step, but I then need to know what you want to achieve, what are your desired outcomes in life?

I ask: "If we were having this conversation three years from today, what would need to happen both personally and professionally for you to be happy with your progress?"

What a great question! Of course these are not questions I have come up with but having spent time with pioneers of financial planning such as Dan Sullivan, Paul Armson, Mitch Anthony, William Shute et al, I have the confidence to put these questions at the forefront of our service.

You see, a year goes in a heartbeat, and before you know it, you're well into the next.

I want to articulate, challenge and document your desired outcomes, so we can work together to achieve them.

Why you might engage a planner

I am fortunate to work with many successful families: a financial planner's commodity is money, and money is often a by-product of success.

What I have found is that although they are brilliant at what they do, this brilliance does not necessarily transfer over to managing their finances and money.

And why should it? We wouldn't expect a surgeon to be brilliant at art or an architect to understand nutrition, yet often we're embarrassed when we are not experts in finance.

Some of my clients feel they are unable to air their financial concerns with their spouse/significant other, like the desire for early retirement because of an unfulfilled dream, or the stresses of work taking a toll on their wellbeing.

Or perhaps they just want to know there is a safe, trusted pair of hands helping with their finances into their old age, or after a death.

Steven Covey was right 32 years ago when he wrote his famous book: *start with the end in mind*.

Martin Pryor
Lifestyle Financial Planner

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Summer night sights

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

JUNE, a favourite month for most of us but the least favourite of astronomers. Why? Well, on the 21st at 4pm, the Earth's north pole reaches its maximum tilt towards the Sun, giving us the Summer Solstice which means longer days that tend to warm us up a bit.

By the same token, it also means that the Sun never dips far below the horizon at night. In fact, it never dips far enough below for it to be called night at all. You can look this up on timeanddate.com and in the section that gives you the length of night it says "not for this day" for the whole of June.

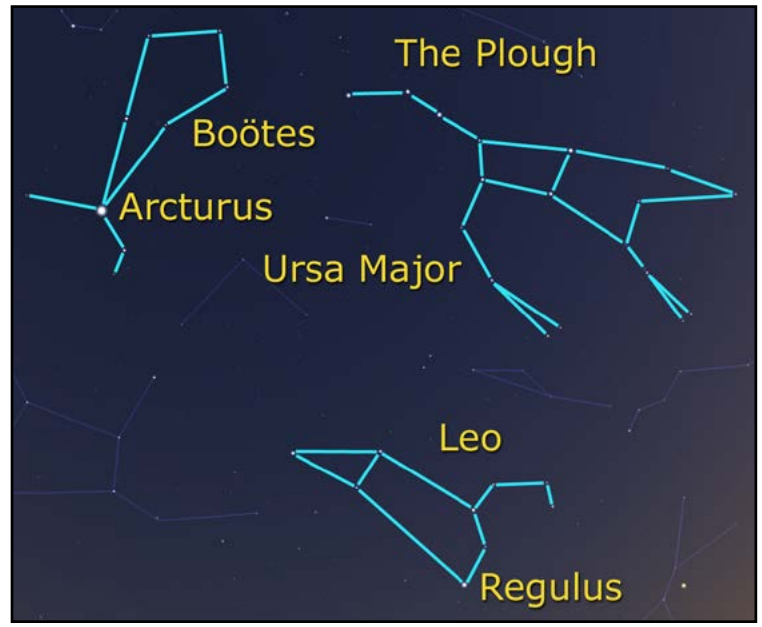
We only ever get twilight and that doesn't start until about 10pm.

So, what can we see when it does get slightly dark? To begin with, we have the brightest object in the sky, Venus. It's over in the west now just above the horizon and still looking dazzling despite the lack of darkness.

It is catching us up now as we orbit the Sun and will start to curve round in front of our home star so this is the last month we will get a clear view of it.

The last chance to see the wonderful sight of Venus and a thin crescent Moon together is on the 21st so do look out for that.

As the evening progresses and the sky gets darker, you should be able to spot two stars to the right of Venus, these are Pollux and Castor, famous as the heads of the twins of Gemini. These, too, disappear from the evening sky for now as the Sun is between us and them until the Autumn.



Late night sights: Some of the stars and constellations that can be spotted on darker nights in June, including Leo. *Pictures courtesy of NASA.*

Looking further to the right, north of north west, is one of the brightest stars in our sky, Capella.

It's almost 11pm before we get a good view of the only other planet visible in the evening sky and that is Mars.

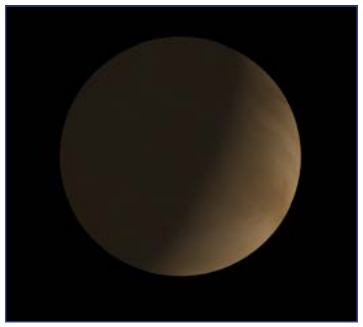
Look to the left and above Venus, opposite Castor, its distinct orange colour easily identifies it, sitting in the constellation of cancer, the Crab although that is difficult to make out.

The red planet will disappear behind the Sun now as we race ahead of it, to reappear late next year.

Over in the west is Leo with his foot on the bright star Regulus. He is now distinctly tilted, his head bowing down towards the Sun.

High above him is another animal, The Great Bear or Ursa Major, although we tend to only notice his hindquarters which form the asterism the Plough.

At this time of year, the bear is



Venus: As seen through a telescope.

the right way up which is always a good thing to be, especially at this time of night.

Further left is the very brightest star we can see at the moment and this is Arcturus, sitting at the base of a kite shape of stars forming Boötes, the Herdsman who is said to be hunting the Great Bear.

It's really late in the evening now and sensible people shouldn't be out so I'll see you next time.

MAY JUNE BRING BETTER

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

APRIL proved to be quite a changeable month, particularly over the 10th, 11th and 12th, where strong winds blew, with a gust of 45mph on the 12th.

There were many damp, dull days during April, however both sunshine and rainfall were near average, at 110% and 112% respectively, and what we would expect for the month.

In May, the first half of the month was quite wet, with quite a few showers so far. Rainfall in the first half of the month was close to average, at 28.7mm, 44% of what we'd expect for the whole month.

The rain and showers has resulted in lower than average sunshine levels, only 62.4 hour, 37% of what we would expect.

Daytime temperatures were below what would be expected for May. Looking back, May has been much warmer in recent years and only milder nights have made the mean temperature of 12.4C slightly above the average, by 0.3 degrees.

However, we experienced warmer, sunnier days towards the middle of and end of the month, hopefully this continues into June.

The Outlook

PREDICTING the weather in the coming weeks with any accuracy is difficult.

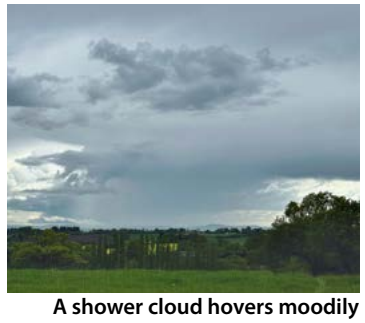
Currently, signals suggest high pressure will dominate at first, bringing a fair amount of dry and bright weather.

However, this will likely turn more generally unsettled later in the period with a greater chance of low pressure being the dominant feature.

Perhaps greater confidence, relatively, can be found in temperatures being generally near to, or a little above average through this period . . . so we should hope, anyway: it will be summer after all!

Above: A sunny rape field brightens the landscape.

Sunshine breaks through trees.



A shower cloud hovers moodily over the hills.

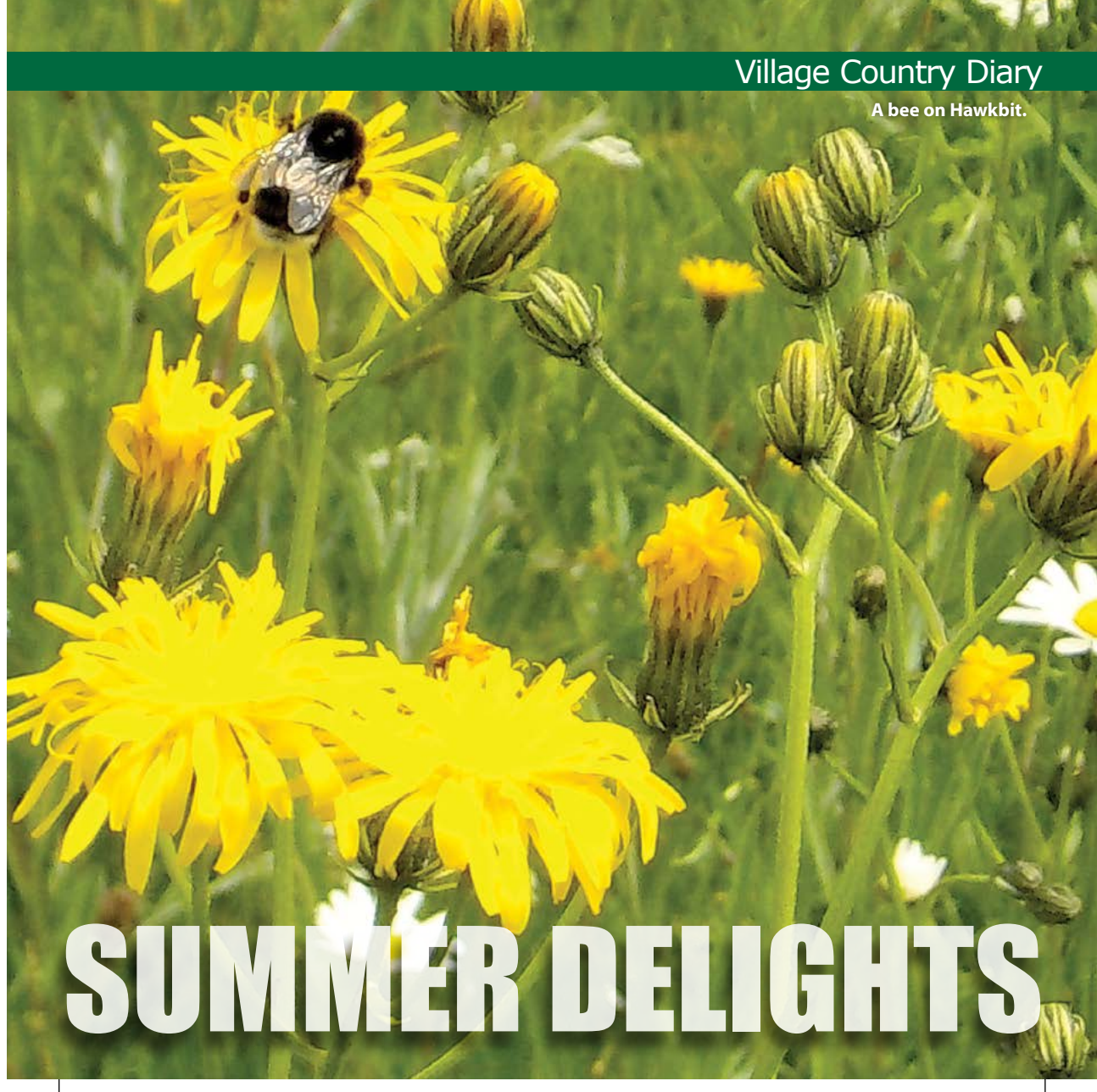
April 2023

Mean Max	12.7C	0.8C below average
Mean Min	4.5C	0.2C above average
Mean	8.6C	0.3C below average
Rainfall	66.0mm	110% of average
Sunshine	154.2hrs	112% of average

May 2023 (to the 14th)

Mean Max	16.3C	0.4C below average
Mean Min	8.5C	1.1C above average
Mean	12.4C	0.3C above average
Rainfall	28.7mm	44% of average
Sunshine	62.4hrs	37% of average

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***



A bee on Hawkbit.

SUMMER DELIGHTS

Mary Green reminds us of the beauty June brings to our villages, and the flora and fauna you'll find on your doorstep.

IT has continued to be an odd year, with flowers and leaves coming out late along with the insects and birds that they host. At least everything seems to be coming late together, so they aren't out of step.

The bluebells weren't fully out in Peck Wood for its open week in April and few of the trees were in leaf. It was still lovely, and they did do one extra day later so we could get that all-over bluebell sight and scent. There's also a gorgeous wood up Grange Lane, easily viewed from the road.

I loved walking through Alvechurch village alongside unmown verges – well done to our local council for agreeing to leave them longer. I saw lady's smock in flower and a whole bank of Good Friday Grass, as well as daisies, dandelions and primroses. I even found the now-uncommon flower pignut on a roadside bank. The dandelions were

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spectacular: I wish people valued them more. They are a key food plant for our insects early in the year, and we need them!

When we get to June, the season for seeing flowering plants, insects and birds is well established and a walk through anywhere round our area is a pleasure.

I like to walk through fields at this time, as the open-ground flowers are out now, hosting a lot of other wild life. Woodland is fully in leaf, so it goes a bit quieter as the ground flowers have mostly finished. However, the hedgerow remnants of woodland are still full of flowers, especially where they catch the sun.

There are several good open-field walks from Alvechurch and its area. But if you want to see biodiversity you need to walk through fields of old pasture, traditionally grazed and "unimproved", or through hay meadows.

A meadow is a field which is cut for hay as well as grazed. Grazing by cattle is better for biodiversity than grazing by sheep and horses, though the latter work well if the animals are not kept on any patch of land very long.

Many of the horse and sheep pastures round here are over-grazed so lack biodiversity. There's an old saying that sheep shouldn't hear the church bells twice in the same field.

Modern conservation farming involves moving the animals round regularly from field to field – sometimes called "mob grazing". It's different in upland moors and mountains, where sheep are "hefted" or learn to be attached to large areas where they can roam at will. They find their own way to fresh pasture.

Traditional pasture and meadow are based on perennial plants, a mixture of native grasses and other flowers. Modern grazing land is often monoculture grass and not useful for biodiversity. So, look out for a field with a pattern of different coloured flowers at this time of year.

Hay is usually cut in July (modern silage much earlier) so you should find long grass and flowering plants in a June meadow.

If you want to travel a bit, you can

Dog roses: seen in the hedges on Scarfield Hill.

visit Eades Meadow near Hanbury, a national nature reserve which shows what a proper old meadow is like. But you can find something similar on footpaths near here.

My two best recommendations are to walk from Withybed up the footpath to Foxhill, through the fields of Coopers Hill Farm, or to go from the little aqueduct on the canal in Scarfield Dingle and follow to Salt Way away from the village up that first field.

You can combine them by going right up the Salt Way to Grange Lane and round the roads at the top, then back down from Foxhill.

However, there are very unwelcoming high stiles towards Grange Lane, and the other fields and hedges are not so prepossessing between the two!

Please remember that you only have access along public footpaths and don't wander (you and your dogs!) across the fields.

The fields from Withybed are hay meadows. During June they are full of flowers and varied native grasses.

Thirty years ago, these fields were

A rare sight: Green winged orchis.

Sunshine yellow: Double creeping buttercups.

quite lacking in diversity, but they have been brought back by regenerative farming, and get better every year.

There are orchids in the first field, though you aren't likely to see them from the path. In May there were green-winged orchids near the bottom, and in June there are common spotted orchids hearer the top.

From the path the main thing you will notice is buttercups. They are a mixture of creeping and meadow buttercups, both native but the meadow ones rarer these days.

The creeping ones are shorter-stemmed with quite coarse leaves and deep gold-yellow flowers.

The meadow ones are taller and have more feathery leaves and are slightly softer coloured. Creeping buttercups in old turf often develop double versions. Most buttercups have five petals, but some of these have seven or eight – I've even seen ten.

Both kinds of buttercups are pollinators, but they don't have many insect larvae feeding off them and they're not very nutritious to animals. So, you really don't want a field completely dominated by buttercups, however photogenic they are!

The other flowers are far more useful for biodiversity. There are many in the clover family. Red and white clover are two of them, but another common one is birds foot trefoil. We used to call this "eggs-and-bacon" as kids because it is red and yellow.

There is a smaller one called medick with little yellow heads. All of these are vital plants. They help keep the nitrogen balance in the soil, they are food plants for larvae of butterflies including the common blue, and good providers of nectar for adult insects. There's so much nectar in clover that when we were kids we pulled out the florets and sucked the honey out of them.

The vetches are in the same family. These look recognisably like pea plants, with the same tendrils and similar shaped small flowers. The purplish-blue bush vetch and tufted vetch are the most common but there is also a yellow meadow vetchling.

There is also a little vetch with tiny

Standing tall: Pink foxgloves on the verge of the field.

flowers called the tare. You may recognise the name from the Bible, where wheat and tares grow together in the field and are only separated after the harvest.

For biodiversity the tare is probably more useful than the wheat, but the point is they grow together.

The clover and trefoil family have the old Latin name Papilionaceae, the same word used for butterflies. As well as blue butterflies, you should see meadow browns galore, and probably marbled whites, speckled woods, gatekeepers and commas in these fields.

Other flowers you are likely to see are self-heal, a strong purple-blue head of small flowers, in the family that includes a lot of culinary herbs. It has medicinal properties.

There is also sorrel, like a smaller delicate dock with very edible leaves, and plantains, full of anti-histamines. Cattle newly turned on to a pasture will make for the sorrel and plantains first. Though these flowers aren't showy, they are also good pollinators.

Later in the month you'll see tall knapweed with purple flowers. There is the less common greater knapweed here in this field, a large very attractive flower. These are in the same family as daisies, as are the tall yellow hawkbits that also grow in these meadows.

The dandelion flowers are gone

Bright and beautiful: Lady's bedstraw.

by June but all this family have been hosting insects since March.

Further up and out in these fields, away from the footpath, are roe deer, foxes and badgers.

Birds are abundant in the field-edge dingles and there are often swallows at the top and buzzards nesting nearby.

The other walk through the field in Scarfield Dingle includes a really unusual stretch of old turf with all its ecosystems, lightly grazed by cattle but not mown for hay.

You can see a lot of plants and insects from the footpath, and I recently

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saw deer footprints there in the path which is often muddy. The first bird I heard as I entered the field was a green woodpecker (which "yaffles" or laughs). It feeds on the ant hills here, which you can see clearly from the path.

Earlier on the field had cowslips, wood anemones and bluebells. In May it is full of pignut, which should still be there in June. This little cow-parsley-like flower has an edible root loved by many animals, and it's the food plant for the chimney sweeper moth, a little almost black creature.

The field has all the flowers as in the hay meadows – and many more. The ant hills in particular are home to tormentil and cinquefoil, little yellow flowers in the rose family.

There is a little lady's mantle, a cousin of the garden Alchemilla. There are several common spotted orchids not far from the path. There's a flower called betony which used to be common but is now rare round here.

Later on in June there's a mass of soft yellow lady's bedstraw, with a sweet scent and covered in insects. There's also a flower called agrimony, a tall yellow spike, which you won't find in hay meadows. It flowers late and doesn't set seeds till August, so it doesn't stand up to being mown for hay.

In both fields there are many flowers of wild roses, on the hedges in the hay meadow and in the bushes dotted about the Scarfield field. There are pink dog roses and white field roses.

You'll also see and smell honeysuckle. These climbing plants can get to the sun even where there is leaf-cover from trees. And of course the brambles will be in flower – attracting many butterflies.

At the edges of both fields there are also foxgloves, showy biennial plants which can appear seemingly from nowhere.

These walks take you through fields full of flowers and therefore insects, birds and animals. Their undisturbed soils will host worms, insect larvae and crustacea, and numerous fungi, and will be storing carbon from way back when. It ought to be a common experience, but not any more.

Some of these fields are farmed in environmental stewardship. Another is listed by Defra as having biological significance. But England has lost 97% of its meadowland.

Meadow and pasture are human-made environments, but they mimic naturally grazed open land to some extent and hold just as much importance for the health of us and our planet as woodland does. Walk through them whenever you get the chance!

■ **Here's a poem (right) I wrote recently for the Withybed Poets.**

Above: Marbled white butterfly seen on Scarfield.
Below: Meadow buttercup, self heal and birds foot trefoil.

Screens

I'm on a train, crowded, fine spring day
I know there would be blackbirds singing round
But am sealed in by glass. I can see though
All the blackthorn of the Black Country blooming
An interesting ride, pretty little towns
And old factories bristling with scaffolds
Always the canal, carrying trees and flowers
In a froth of growth and flitting birds.
Everyone else has in their hand a screen
They watch, they scroll, sometimes they type
The whole journey nobody looks up.
There could be brick walls all along the track
There could be aliens landing in Albrighton
No one would see. The same view at home, at work
On holiday. That little screen. Meanwhile I,
An old mad woman, smile at passing children.

The anonymous **birder** *How to enjoy village birdlife*

The young ones arrive

As you know if you read my monthly ramblings I'm always fascinated by birdsong. Well, as June and summer arrives, the promise of better weather, the comforting sound of leather on willow and all that stuff, a slight melancholy descends as birdsong gradually declines through the month.

Most of the pairing and territories have been established, so there is no need for it anymore. Also, parent birds will not want to draw attention to themselves as June is peak time for brood rearing.

Some birds will have multiple broods, some start early in the year, such as herons and long-tailed tits, some late, such as summer migrants and seed-eating birds like swallows and finches. Pigeons, which aren't fussy with their food, can breed all year round, weather permitting.

Furious activity breaks out in the bird world as parents play the law of averages in order to perpetuate their species. Bird offspring can be broadly divided into two groups, more or less dependent.

Ducks for instance incubate their eggs for longer so the ducklings are more developed when hatched and can operate more independently. These are known as "precocial", and have to have their wits about them from the word go as they are relatively more exposed to predators. Interesting survival behaviour and an ability to scarper when required can be observed in precocials.

I once saw a big clutch of mallard (the world's most successful duck) ducklings simultaneously submerge as a large gull patrolled the park lake looking for a late afternoon snack, popping up and down in a fluffy panic as the gull quartered the lake.

The second group, which you may be more familiar with, are "altricial" or more dependent young. These will generally be incubated for a shorter period and spend more time developing in the nest, sometimes having to be firmly persuaded to leave.

Punk chick: A young coot among the reeds. Picture/*Paul Wilde*

As anyone familiar with *Springwatch* will know, the survival rate is pretty dire, around 10%, and with all the challenges they meet it is often a miracle they survive at all.

Birds aren't deterred by the harsh statistics of nature and just develop strategies to cope. Blue tits can have broods well into double figures and have to make hundreds of feeding trips a day. Each chick eats around 100 caterpillars a day so if you have ten chicks, which is not uncommon, you do the math as they say.

Don't forget the faecal sac removal, some parent birds will eat these, like a frazzled parent finishing off their pride and joy's leftover food. This goes on for about three weeks. Unsurprisingly, the parents look pretty threadbare after this but continue to feed the young for another few weeks.

This pattern is typical of many of our garden birds. They probably don't have the energy to sing after all that. However, birds will modify the number of young to the available food source. Urban broods being typically smaller than rural birds. Down on the lake or canals look out for little grebe chicks looking like Everton mints hitching a ride on their parent's backs.

Moorhen and coot chicks are the day-glo orange and red spiky haired little punks of the June watercourses. It is almost *Anarchy in the UK* among these species' family groups, many of which are too gruesome to mention here but you can look them up if you have a morbid interest.

Both coots and moorhens will also sneakily lay some eggs in a neighbour's nest when they have their backs turned. There was a scientific report that suggested that coots may be able to count and thus could tell if an interloper had visited their nest. If you see a coot counting out on its wing feathers and semi-palmated feet let me know.

There are as many fascinating life cycle stories as there are species; the birds will be very busy and visible in a hectic June before the quiet of late summer descends. See what unusual or maybe even dysfunctional behaviour you can discover on your patch. Happy birding.

JL

To advertise your gardening business or service in The Village, call us on: 07536987950 or email fran@villageonline.co.uk

A serene canalside garden during Alvechurch Open Gardens in 2021

ALVECHURCH BLOOMS IN JUNE

ON June 17 and 18, several gardens in Alvechurch will once again be opening their gates to visitors under the National Gardens Scheme. Visitors will be able to explore the different gardens open around the village, enjoy beautiful surroundings and get inspiration for their own gardens and outdoor spaces.

The Village has featured a number of the National Garden Scheme events in the past. Over the last decade or so, Withybed Green and Alvechurch have been opening on alternate years, and this year it's the turn of the Alvechurch group. Alvechurch

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Alvechurch Open Gardens, part of the National Gardens Scheme, is back for 2023, writes **Chris Miall**. Taking place over the weekend of June17-18, villagers will open their gardens for visitors to explore and enjoy, while raising money for charity at the same time.

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gardens last opened in 2021 (having been delayed by a year due to Covid) and the event was hugely popular, with about 900 visitors making their way around Alvechurch to view the gardens over the weekend and raising more than £7,000 for charity.

The NGS raises about £3 million each year for health and care charities including Macmillan Nurses, Marie Curie Cancer support, Hospice UK, the Queen's Nursing Institute, the Carers Trust and Parkinson's UK.

It also supports hospice garden schemes, as well as the training of professional gardeners.

Almost £79,000 was generated across Worcestershire last year and Alvechurch is one of the largest contributors for the county.

This year, it is expected that 11 gardens will be open, including several which will be new to the scheme, and some that haven't opened in recent years and are returning to showcase their gardens once again.

There will be a good range of gardens to enjoy, from the small and tidy, to the large and not-so-tidy – but wildlife friendly.

Even the gardens that have opened in the past will likely have new features to discover.

The Alvechurch allotments on Rectory Lane are also opening, with an interesting mix of plots to explore.

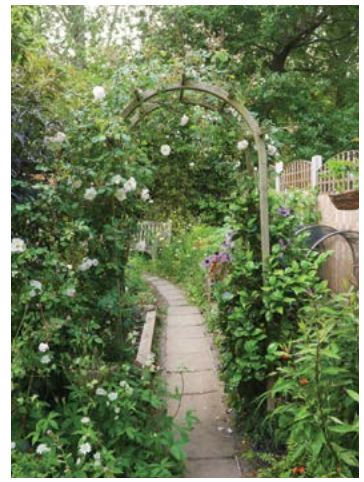
Tea and refreshments will be on sale in the Baptist Church Hall on both days over the weekend.

Villagers are invited to join in and enjoy the diverse range of gardens, with a gentle walk around the village topped off with tea and cake, and all for a very good cause.

Tickets for entry to all 11 gardens are £6 per person and can be bought at any of the gardens.

Wychwood House on Bear Hill and Rectory Cottage on Old Rectory Lane will have card readers, but the other gardens will be cash only.

Find out more about the NGS: www.ngs.org.uk



Clockwise from left: A garden on Rectory Lane displays an unusual and beautiful water feature; a floral arch frames a path; garden host Martin Wright shows off his borders; Alvechurch Allotments ready to burst with produce.

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WHAT'S ON GUIDE

EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA next concert is 'FRENCH FANCIES' an evening of French musical treats at 7.30pm on Saturday nd July at St Laurence Church Alvechurch. The programme, conducted by guest Dexter Drown, will include Ravel's Bolero, Faure's Requiem, Bologne's Chevalier de Saint-George Symphony.
TMS will be joined by local chamber choir Oakville Singers and soprano soloist Isabelle Palmer for the Faure Requiem. This concert is part of Bromsgrove Festival and the final concert of the current season.
Tickets: £13 (£3 students & under 16) are available online at midlandsinfonia.co.uk or from Gin & Pickles or The Lounge in The Square, Alvechurch. Also (if available) on the door £14 (&3) card or cash. Doors and bar open 7pm. www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk

PICNIC IN THE PARK returns to The Meadows, Alvechurch for the 11th year on Sunday 28 May. The dog show will kick off at 10.30am with the official opening at 12pm. The event will run until 4.30pm where visitors can then pack up and go to Alvechurch Cricket Club for afternoon and evening events.

ALVECHURCH BAPTIST CHURCH are hosting a lunch for carers and those for who they care on Tuesday July 11 July. Prior to the lunch, in conjunction with Worcester Carers Association they have arranged a craft workshop involving various crafts such as card making, plant pots etc. The craft session begins at 11am with lunch at 12.30pm. If you would like to come on, please ring either 0197 108934 or 0121 447 7369 where a message can be left otherwise e-mail dlshoesmith@yahoo.co.uk

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. For more information or to join or book them, see their website: www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They will be performing at the Picnic in the Park on 28 May and will be in the Village Hall on 4, 18 & 25 June and at the Crown on 11 June. They will also be performing at the Baptist Church on 24 June.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA conducted by Lee Armstrong, will give their Summer Concert on Sunday 25 June 2023 at 7.30pm in St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, B45 8NR. The interesting programme will include: Glazunov – A la Memoire d'un heros, Mozart – Exsultate jubilate with soprano soloist Miriam Ridgway, Dvorak - Symphony no. 8 in G major. Admission is free, and donations to the retiring collection are much appreciated. Please come along to support them, and take your friends. Save the Date of their Autumn Concert, which will be on 10 December 2023 in the same venue.

50 YEARS IN THE FRESH AIR

THE BROMSGROVE RAMBLERS walking group became constituent members of The Ramblers Association Charity in 1973 and this year celebrates 50 year of the charity. To mark this historic milestone, the members (in addition to having a party) are also re-walking the 30 mile Bromsgrove circular walk that was mapped out at the time of their 30th Anniversary.

The walk, which will be over four days, is open to anyone who would like to join the experience. Each stage of the walk will be approximately seven miles in distance and will be organised as follows:
Tuesday 4th July – Wychbold to Chaddesley Corbett;
Thursday 6th July – Chaddesley Corbett to Lydiate Ash;
Monday 10th July – Lydiate Ash to Tardebigge;
Wednesday 12th July – Tardebigge to Wychbold

Each day the meeting point will be the carpark at All Saints Church Hall on Burcot Lane at 9.50am for a 10am drive to the start of the walk. Bring sturdy footwear, a packed lunch and some suitable all-weather clothing.

Bromsgrove Ramblers organise 3 regular local walks each month – one long (about 8 – 10 miles), one short (about 4 – 6 miles) and one shorter which will have some point of interest and may end at a pub or tea room (about 3 – 4 miles).

They offer day coach trips further afield twice a year, travelling to say the Shropshire Hills or The Peak District and providing a choice of two hikes.

Additionally there are a couple of Week-Ends Away – they recently visited the Lake District, North Wales and the Devon Coast – and they also have social events, such as summer Pub rambles, Quiz evenings and meals out.

Bromsgrove Ramblers invite you to join them for the chance to enjoy fresh air, amid some beautiful landscapes in good company with the opportunity to make new friends. Social group walking with a leader allows you to relax and enjoy your surroundings.

For more information contact Group Secretary Peter on 07772 458130

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings. They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical music along with much more. Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk. They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. Face to face groups have now resumed, meeting on Wednesdays 2-3pm at Longbridge Retirement Village and Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs weekly sessions for young brass, wind, and string instrument players to enjoy being part of a group who rehearse and perform together. New members always welcome!
Sessions are run by Severn Arts at St John's Middle School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm. Individual instrumental and vocal lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/ Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing.
They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurch-frenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry. They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day. No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group! Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

BALLROOM/LATIN SEQUENCE dance some line dance held on the first Friday of the month (check just in case Friday has to change because of commitments in the village) from 8pm -10.30pm at Extracare Longbridge Village, B31 2FZ. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

LINEDANCE CLASS, every Thursday between 6pm - 7pm at Extracare Longbridge Village. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

BEGINNERS LINEDANCE class, Tuesdays 6pm - 7pm at West Heath Community Centre, Hamstead House, B31 3QY. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Extra safety measures are in place. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS warmly invite everyone to the Friends Meeting House on Sandhills Road. Parking is available on site, and there is access for the disabled. We hope you will visit us to meet old and new friends for a chat and a (free!) cup of tea or coffee. It does us all good just to get out of our homes for a short time now and then. The Meeting House is a pleasant, quiet and comfortable place where you can meet other people.
They will be hosting free film screenings on the third Fridays of the month. The next one, on the 16 June at 7pm is an Oscar-winning film of two British track athletes, are driven to win in the 1924 Olympics as they wrestle with issues of pride and conscience. It won the OFTA Film Hall of Fame Score by Vangelis.
The next film screening will be on 15 September at 7pm, A celebrated Western about a Quaker Newley-wed has to face criminals arriving on the 12.00 midday train who

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plant to kill her Sheriff Husband…
Followed by "Romeo and Juliet" Shakespeare's greatest love story as told by a master Italian filmmaker. It is the most beatifull screen version with a controversial love scene on 20 October at 7pm.
They will also be holding 'The Quaker Service Memorial Exhibition', which will be displayed at the Friends Meeting House on Friday 9 June 10.30am-6pm and Saturday 10 June 2-6pm, admission is free.
The Barnt Green & Redditch Quakers invite you to a series of study groups around Deeper Meaning in the Miracles. They will be held at the Friends Meeting House, on Wednesdays from 7.30-9pm. The next one will be 'The Gerasene Demoniac' on 7 June, followed by 'The Two Sea Miracles' on 21 June. For further details email: bgr.quakerstudy@gmail.com

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute.
You can now find one of these hubs in Alvechurch. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, however you may find these in many different places such as community centres or libraries, and all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood.
Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall. Entry is £1 for members and £2 for guests, including a drink and biscuit. AVS is always pleased to welcome new members—contact Martin on 07742 100007 or martin-clarke1@btinternet.com
An evening of fun and games with fish and chips will be held on Sunday 17th June at 7pm, this will be a ticketed event with more information to follow.

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be very pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details:
www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Sheila (0121 445 2813) or Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre.
If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heartspeakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmastersheartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

MIDLAND Ancestors meet monthly at Bromsgrove Methodist Centre (19 Stratford Road, Bromsgrove, B60 1AS). More info at: www.bromsgrovebmsgh.co.uk

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 3rd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month. There is usually a guest speaker.
They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity.
Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or look on Facebook @wbdcs.org.uk. Please email contact@wbdcs.org.uk for further information. Meetings start at 7.45pm. Non-members are always welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB usually meets on the second Weds each month, and offers the chance to make new friends, meet old ones and enjoy talks, demos and visits.
The talk for June will be "The Mysteries of the Titanic" by Paul Betterton.
The talk starts at 1.30pm on 14 June at Alvechurch Cricket Club. Visitors are very welcome and are charged £4.50. Members £1.00. Tea and biscuits are included and a raffle is held each month .

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12noon at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides regular opportunities for retired professionals and businessmen to meet socially and share common interests. A members' meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Weds each month, 10am–12noon, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker. For more info visit www.bromsgroveprobus.co.uk or contact Jim on 01527 833531 bromsgrove1982probus.weebley.com

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment.
They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

IT'S SHOWTIME AT THE FAIR

BARNT GREEN Choral Society will present "It's Showtime" at Bromsgrove Fair on 24 June, the show will include songs from musical favourites such as *The Lion King*, *Les Miserables* and *Fiddler on the Roof*.

The choir will be joined by well-known local soprano Catherine Tabberner, who will sing some great show-time solos, and both will be backed by a five-piece instrumental ensemble. The show starts at 3pm in the Bromsgrove Baptist Church.

Tickets will be on sale for £12 each, plus a £1 booking fee, and are available at www.ticketsource.co.uk (Search for "It's Showtime") - or for £12 each on the door. Entry for under 16s is free.

The ticket price includes refreshments after the concert. For more information including parking for the event, and about Barnt Green Choral Society, visit www.barntgreenchoralsociety.org.

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit the website: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT headquarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than

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this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com
The next walk will be held on 4 June at 2pm, led by Gerard Nash around Tardebigge New Wharf and canal locks. Meet at Tardebigge Village car park on Church Lane, B60 3AH. Contact 0121 445 4454 for more information. On 7 July, the end of season walk and social will be held at 6.30pm meeting at Rowney Green Village Hall car park, B48 7QP, finishing at The Goat and Trousers in the hall.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners). Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

RELAXATION & MEDITATION for Everyone. Short, welcoming & inclusive classes with an experienced teacher at The Ark, Alvechurch, and online. An experiential approach to relaxation and meditation for a calm, clear mind and relaxed, balanced outlook. For more information, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085.

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park.
Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area.
Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins).
Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established.
Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground.
Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus). Irrespective of age, lifestyle, health and ability, we could all benefit from listening to our bodies: tuning in to our needs, building connections throughout the body, focusing on detail; challenging what is strong, building what is weaker, balancing the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Book a 1:1 apparatus session (Barnt Green) or a mat class (Rowney Green). Call 07759 590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

COMMUNITY Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Baptist Church, run by Bromsgrove council: Active Seniors on Tues 9.30–10.30am. and Zumba Gold on Thurs 1–2pm (each £3.50 per session). Fully-qualified, insured instructors on hand to help. For more info, call 01527 881289 or visit at www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/things-to-do/active-bromsgrove

YOGA for Every-Body. Friendly & Inclusive classes in Blackwell, Alvechurch and online with an experienced teacher. A slow but powerful approach to yoga, which encourages free, natural alignment of the body, whilst building strength, flexibility and relaxed awareness. Contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903663085.

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescyclingclub.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm.

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS sessions to help you relax, find your inner peace, and elevate your life every Wednesday evening 7pm-9.15pm, starting 24 May at the Friends Meeting House, Barnt Green. Suitable for everyone.
Please contact Coz for more info & to book on 07770067349, you can find us on Facebook – MeditationWithCoz, or online, visit: www.meditationwithcoz.com

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 8 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people.
A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and postnatal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life. Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

ROWNEY GREEN PRE-SCHOOL offers learning through play for children from two years to school age, Tues–Thurs 9am–2pm, term-time only. Call 07522 926286 or see Facebook.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG. Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

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THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250

SPADESBOURNE Bridge Club plays at Amphlett Hall, Crown Close, Bromsgrove B61 8DW. Join the group for friendly bridge in a pleasant venue on Thurs evenings, 7pm for a 7.15 start. Table money for visitors is £3. Details from Jan on 01905 772256.

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House would like to welcome a few new members – for more info contact the organiser, Des Clarke, on 0121 453 3034.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY.
We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon and would like new members – contact Liz on 07538 092296.

ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request" as they will be doing in the Picnic in the Park on 28 May. For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

COMMON THREAD: Bring your knitting, crochet, patchwork, sewing etc. All are welcome. Friendly help and chat. Meets on the last Saturday of each month (apart from Christmas Day, of course!) in The Wheel at St. Catherine's, Blackwell B60 1BN.
Please bring your own drink to stay covid safe. Further information from Angela Bevan 0121 477 9924.

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroft-arts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the last Tues of the month from 2pm–3.30pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide HQ in Blackwell Road, Barnt Green. Tuesday morning and Tuesday afternoon sessions. Workshops with visiting tutors during each term. There is a waiting list, but enquiries from improvers and intermediate artists welcomed. Jackie: 0121 445 4745.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY usually meet at The Village Hall on the second Thursday each month at 7.15pm. However they will not be holding their usual monthly meeting at The Village Hall on the second Thursday in June but there is an organised trip to the new RHS Bridgewater, Salford, which Members are looking forward to. Should you require any information in joining the Society please do not hesitate to contact Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

ROWNEY GREEN FLOWER CLUB, meets on the fourth Thursday of the month except in December when it is the first Thursday. They next meet on Thursday 22 June, where Claire Bond, who has delighted them with her arrangements on several previous occasions, will be demonstrating. The meeting will be preceded by the AGM, starting at 7.15pm, with the demonstrations starting at 7.45pm. The cost for visitors is £5, which includes refreshments. There will also be a raffle, where one of the beautiful arrangements can be won for a £1 raffle ticket.

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD.
For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about. Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community. No previous experience is necessary and full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! More information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcross-wi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7.00pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7.30pm on the second Tues every month at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence on 01527 822611 or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Mariea Clarke clarke.mariea@gmail.com or alvechurchpres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susan-barratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, Whetty Lane, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Anyone can just drop in on either night. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

FAIRFIELD WI meet at Fairfield village hall on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm. For further details contact Carol Hine at fairfieldwi1932@gmail.com

VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for

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WANT YOUR EVENT IN *THE VILLAGE*?

If you have an event, or an idea that you would like to see us feature in *The Village*, please email the details to info@villageonline.co.uk. We would love to hear about your community news and events, so please let us know.

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one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE HALL is available for hire to groups, clubs, societies, and private parties. The large bright hall has a stage, PA system, kitchen and bar area. There is also a smaller conference room available for hire. Enquiries to the Hall Manager Andrea Ottley on 07455892909 or hallmanager.avh@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH CRICKET CLUB PAVILION is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

FAIRFIELD VILLAGE HALL is available to hire for functions, groups and parties. It has a large hall with kitchen facilities. Contact the booking secretary Andrew on 07762749943 or bookings@fvh.org.uk. See website for details www.fvh.org.uk

FEATURE IN WHAT'S ON

The deadline for submissions to the What's On section in the upcoming July/August issue of *The Village* is 10 June 2023. Please email: info@villageonline.co.uk for more information or to feature in the listings.

Hidden gem with a warm heart

Nick 'Jonah' Jones, of Alvechurch & Hopwood Cricket Club, looks forward to better weather and a summer of fun on and off the pitch.

Given that it's located at the heart of its Worcestershire village, adjoining the local Middle School, and that it can trace its roots back to 1866, it's a little surprising that more people in the vicinity don't know about Alvechurch & Hopwood Cricket Club.

One reason could be that, although the busy Birmingham Road runs alongside the club, access to the ground is up a small, modestly-signposted lane, and the matchday goings-on are shielded from passing traffic by residential housing; casual cricket enthusiasts are missed.

Similarly, the club's second ground – set within a natural bowl two miles up the road at Hopwood – boasts a stunning, bucolic vista, but doesn't get much passing traffic, other than occasional ramblers.

The club's usual winter nets at Bromsgrove School stoked everyone's enthusiasm for the coming season. A few new players were joining, and some of the club's promising juniors were stepping up to senior cricket for the first time.

But the buzz of pre-season anticipation was dampened by the incessant rains of March and April. The damp Spring weather, though frustrating for players, was far worse for the overworked groundsmen who constantly looked to leaden skies, hoping for breaks in the deluge so that they could coax reluctant, heavy machinery over sodden grounds.

Despite the groundsmen's tireless efforts, the season has started with a number of games and training sessions having to be abandoned. Unable to be cut as often as it usually would, the grass covering is unusually long and spongey, and runs hard to come by, as even the most crisply of executed cover drives is grabbed greedily by the lush outfield.

Should you care to watch a match this summer, you'll soon see that the clubhouse at Alvechurch is no work of architectural beauty; no one not under the influence of considerable lubrication has ever mistaken it for the Taj Mahal.

But the façade masks a welcoming and modern interior, refurbished during the off-season to make the pavilion more attractive to post-match and post-coaching socialising, as well as to external hires.

The bar is run by the brilliant Emma and Stuart Brereton, always friendly, forever coming up with new ideas to draw in more guests. To counter rising costs and make best use of the new bar, this year the club has moved coaching for 5 to 11-year-olds from its Sunday morning berth to Friday evenings.

At the same time, outside mobile caterers have been booked to offer attendees a variety of enticing treats with the intention that over the summer, Friday evenings at Alvechurch & Hopwood Cricket Club become the perfect way to kick off the weekend with friends in a relaxed environment, as the kids play safely on the outfield. Equally, for locals who are neither cricketers nor parents of young cricketers, there's no need to miss out on the fun as the club has recently introduced a very affordable social membership scheme.

The club prides itself on the continued growth and successes of its women's and junior sections. The women's team, aged between 14 and 65, and skippered brilliantly by the infectiously enthusiastic Alice Chase, are a really supportive group who are eager to learn the nuances of this peculiar pastime, and delight in each other's triumphs and progression.

As for the talented youth section, the club has enjoyed considerable success in recent years and now has a good smattering of county representatives across the different age groups.

In order for the club to be self-sustaining long-term, all the club's junior coaches come from within its own playing or parental ranks, with the club paying for them to gain their qualifications with the financial help of its valued corporate sponsors.

So, with four senior Saturday sides in the Worcestershire and Cotswold Hills Leagues, a Sunday league team, a vibrant women's section that has already made an impressive start to the 2023 season, and a thriving youth set-up providing cricket for girls and boys aged from five to 16, there's plenty of opportunity at Alvechurch this summer for anyone interested in either giving cricket a try, or returning to the game, no matter their age, athleticism or ability.

Welcome: The club's refurbished bar area and (below) the smiles say it all.

That cliché said, Alvechurch remains at its heart endearingly – and sometimes frustratingly – amateurish and so, were Ben Stokes ever to be at a loose end one weekend and rock up at the Birmingham Road ground looking for a game, he may be a little disappointed with the porous quality of the fielding on display, the lack of raw pace in the bowling attack, and some of the comically inept means by which some of the batsmen manage to bring about their own demise.

As always, the Picnic in the Park's evening celebrations will be hosted at the cricket club. Come along if you're free and get a sense for this hidden diamond of a club, and whether it might be the right vehicle to supplement your own sporting or social cravings.

Should the sun ever shine for a sustained period and the water tables subside, this promises to be a fun and exciting summer at Alvechurch & Hopwood Cricket Club.

If you fancy being part of the action, or just finding out a little bit more, please contact Junior Section Co-ordinator, Nick Jones, for more information on 07779 267609.

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